

BLADDER CANCER. SAME SYMPTOMS. DIFFERENT STORY.

Primary Care Toolkit



The same symptoms could mean a different story.

Contact your GP practice about symptoms that could be bladder cancer.

Campaign overview

In the UK, over 20,000 people are diagnosed with bladder cancer each year, yet it is still not widely recognised as a common cancer.

RM Partners NHS Cancer Alliance for north west and south west London, in partnership with Action Bladder Cancer UK (ABC UK), is supporting a campaign to help more people recognise the signs and symptoms of bladder cancer and to contact their GP practice early.

The campaign is focusing on people over the age of 50, particularly women (where bladder cancer is more commonly overlooked, those from lower socio-economic groups as these people are most likely to experience a late-stage cancer diagnosis, and people from Black and South Asian ethnic backgrounds, who are known to experience health inequalities.

The campaign will run in areas of highest deprivation across all 14 boroughs in north west (NW) and south west (SW) London on bus shelters, social media and online search engines and will be supported by local community partnerships activity. The bladder cancer awareness campaign will run from 1st September until 30th September 2025.

☒ Blood in pee (even just once)

☒ Urinary infection (UTIs) that keeps returning

☒ Pain, burning or stinging when peeing

☒ Peeing urgently or more often than usual

These could be symptoms of bladder cancer. Contact your GP practice.

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The key messages include:

- Tobacco use is the single biggest risk factor for bladder cancer.
- Symptoms of bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women, as they can overlap with the symptoms of urinary tract infections (UTIs) or gynaecological issues including menopausal/post-menopausal symptoms.
- Women have a higher 1-year adverse survival rate than men, making early recognition and referral especially important at improving outcomes.
- Increasing symptom awareness (particularly regarding visible blood in urine) will enable patients to consult with a healthcare professional earlier, meaning there is opportunity for earlier diagnosis and reduced late-stage diagnosis.
- About 80% of people diagnosed with stage 1 bladder cancer survive their cancer for 5 years or more, compared with about 10% 5 year survival rate for people diagnosed at stage 4.
- When bladder cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

The key symptoms to look out for are:

- Blood in pee (even just once)
- Urinary tract infection (UTI) that keeps returning
- Pain, burning or stinging when peeing
- Peeing urgently or more often than usual

Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason and feeling generally unwell

Whilst it is unlikely to be bladder cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if experiencing any of these symptoms.

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Dr Bushra Khawaja
GP
North West London



Campaign overview

“Recognising the symptoms of bladder cancer is key to early diagnosis. Unfortunately, some cases can be diagnosed late, leading to worse outcomes. Bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women, where symptoms can be confused as urinary tract infections or gynaecological issues. It's important to never ignore blood in your urine. Be aware of the signs and visit your GP practice if you have any concerns”.

Jeannie Rigby
CEO
Action Bladder Cancer UK

“Being alert to symptoms that may be caused by bladder cancer is important, because the earlier cancer is found the much greater the chance of cure. Important symptoms include seeing blood in your urine or symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI) that don't get better or keep coming back, even if you have had antibiotics. The risk of bladder increases as we get older and is more likely in people who have smoked or used tobacco. If you have noticed these symptoms, please visit your GP and discuss your concerns.”

Dr Lucy Hollingworth
RMP Deputy Medical Director & NWL Primary Care Cancer Lead

Dr Lucy Sneddon
RMP SWL Cancer Clinical Director

To download shareable social media assets, visit the campaign website at [SameSymptomsDifferentStory.com](https://www.samesymptomsdifferentstory.com)

For more information about bladder cancer visit www.actionbladdercanceruk.org or www.nhs.uk/conditions/bladder-cancer/

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Dr Brintha Sivajee
GP
Richmond



Risks and causes of bladder cancer

Tobacco use

Around half of all bladder cancers are caused by tobacco use. Using any type of tobacco product, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes and shisha, is the biggest cause of preventable bladder cancer in the UK.

The risk of getting bladder cancer is greater for those who have used tobacco compared to someone who has not. People with the highest risk are those who have a history of heavy or long tobacco use, or who have used tobacco from a young age.

How smoking may increase risk

Chemicals in tobacco smoke get into the bloodstream. They are then filtered out of the blood by the kidneys and end up in the urine. When the urine is stored in the bladder, these chemicals are in contact with the bladder lining.

Chemicals called arylamines are known to cause bladder cancer. Arylamines in cigarette smoke may be the cause of the increased risk.

Chemicals at work

Certain types of jobs can cause a higher risk of bladder cancer because of exposure to certain chemicals, such as those who work as within the textile industry, or that involve handling carbon or crude oil.

Family history

You might have a slight increase in risk of bladder cancer if you have a first degree relative with bladder cancer. First degree means a parent, child, sister or brother.

Pelvic radiotherapy

You might have an increased risk of getting secondary bladder cancer after having radiotherapy for cancer before.

Being overweight

Some research has shown that you may be at an increased risk of getting bladder cancer if you're overweight.

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Dr Navdeep Alg
GP
South West London

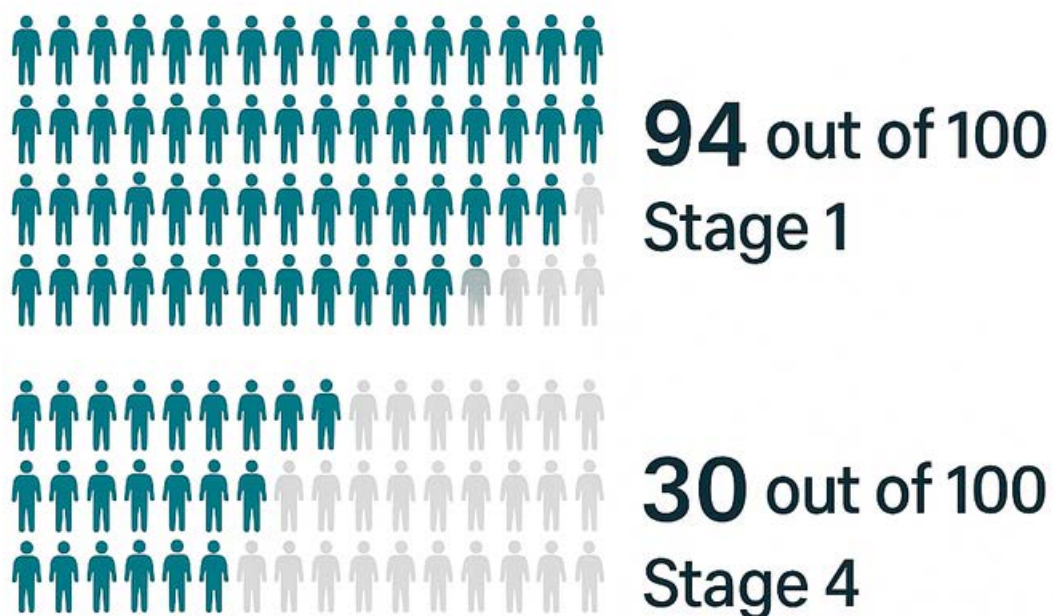


Risks and causes of bladder cancer

In England, around 72 of every 100 people diagnosed with bladder cancer in the least deprived group survive their disease for 1 year, compared with around 67 out of 100 of people in the most deprived group (2015-2019).

There is a 14.6% difference in 1-year survival between males (71.2%) and females (56.6%) and a 13.3% difference in 5-year survival between males (46.3%) and females (33.2%) in the most deprived groups between 2015-2019

Bladder cancer 1-year survival by stage



Source: NDRS-Cancer Survival

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Primary care top tips

1

Refer on an Urgent Suspected Cancer (USC) pathway if any presentation with visible haematuria in adults over 45 years old and either:

- UTI which persists or recurs after successful treatment
- UTI excluded

2

Non-visible haematuria (NVH) is considered significant if present in 2 out of 3 samples. If dipstick finding of NVH:

- 2 - 3+ = definite positive result
- 1+ = request urine microscopy to confirm if blood present (if locally available)

3

Assess patients over 60 years old with NVH for dysuria or raised white cell count on FBC, as these features are associated with an increased risk of bladder cancer thus warrant a USC referral.

4

If age under 60 and unexplained significant NVH present - obtain urology or nephrology advice.

5

For all patients:

- Check and review patient tobacco history (including passive smoking)
- Review if blood in urine is attributed to a UTI – think bladder cancer
- Review family history of cancer in particular, bladder
- Check patient's BMI
- Review patient for previous pelvic radiotherapy for cancer
- Ask about patient's occupation

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Further Information

Bladder cancer is the 2nd most common smoking-related cancer, after lung cancer	Mori K, Mostafaei H, Abufaraj M, Yang L, Egawa S, Shariat SF. Smoking and bladder cancer: review of the recent literature. Curr Opin Urol. 2020 Sep;30(5):720-725. doi: 10.1097/MOU.0000000000000804. PMID: 32701723.
44% of bladder cancers in England are caused by smoking	Brown KF, Rumgay H, Dunlop C, Ryan M, Quartly F, Cox A, Deas A, Elliss-Brookes L, Gavin A, Hounsborne L, Huws D, Ormiston-Smith N, Shelton J, White C, Parkin DM. The fraction of cancer attributable to modifiable risk factors in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom in 2015. Br J Cancer. 2018 Apr;118(8):1130-1141. doi: 10.1038/s41416-018-0029-6. Epub 2018 Mar 23. PMID: 29567982; PMCID: PMC5931106.
Bladder cancer incidence in female patients is 47% greater in deprived areas. In males, 23% higher incidence in the most deprived compared to the least.	Bladder cancer incidence by deprivation. CRUK. Available from: https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bladder-cancer/incidence#heading-Four (cited August 2025).
Men are 3 times more likely to be diagnosed with bladder cancer than women, but women are diagnosed with later stage bladder cancer, and have poorer survival	Bladder cancer incidence by gender. CRUK. Available from: https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bladder-cancer/incidence#heading-Zero (cited August 2025).
Late stage diagnosis in women is due to symptoms misdiagnosed in relation to menstruation, urinary tract infection, or cystitis.	Doshi, B., Athans, S.R. & Woloszynska, A. Biological differences underlying sex and gender disparities in bladder cancer: current synopsis and future directions. Oncogenesis 12, 44 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41389-023-00489-9
Increase in UTI prescriptions is observed 9 months before bladder cancer diagnosis. In women it is seen 11 months before bladder cancer diagnosis.	Pre-diagnostic prescription patterns in bladder and renal cancer: a longitudinal linked data study Garth Funston, Marie Moullet, Luke Mounce, Georgios Lyrtzopoulos, Fiona M Walter, Yin Zhou British Journal of General Practice 2024; 74 (740): e149-e155. DOI: 10.3399/BJGP.2023.0122
Key risk factors: • age 50+ • tobacco use • chronic bladder irritation and infections • workplace exposure Bladder cancer risk higher in female smokers	Jubber I, Ong S, Bukavina L, Black PC, Compérat E, Kamat AM, Kiemeny L, Lawrentschuk N, Lerner SP, Meeks JJ, Moch H, Necchi A, Panebianco V, Sridhar SS, Znaor A, Catto JWF, Cumberbatch MG. Epidemiology of Bladder Cancer in 2023: A Systematic Review of Risk Factors. Eur Urol. 2023 Aug;84(2):176-190. doi: 10.1016/j.eururo.2023.03.029. Epub 2023 May 16. PMID: 37198015. Bosch X. Bladder cancer risk higher for women smokers. BMJ. 2001 Apr 21;322(7292):948. PMCID: PMC1120130.
Smoking cessation and elimination of tobacco use reduces bladder cancer risk	Bladder cancer risk. CRUK. Available from: https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bladder-cancer/risk-factors#heading-Two Smoking Cessation and the Risk of Bladder Cancer among Postmenopausal Women Free Yueyao LiCorresponding Author; Hilary A. Tindle; Michael S. Hendryx ORCID logo ; Pengcheng Xun; Ka He; Xiaoyun Liang; Juhua Luo Cancer Prev Res (Phila) (2019) 12 (5): 305–314. https://doi.org/10.1158/1940-6207.CAPR-18-0441

Further Information

Gender inequalities in the promptness of diagnosis of bladder and renal cancer after symptomatic presentation	https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/6/e002861
Improving the diagnostic process for patients with possible bladder and kidney cancer	https://bjgp.org/content/73/733/e575
Treatment Related to Urinary Tract Infections Is Associated with Delayed Diagnosis of Urinary Bladder Cancer	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2588931124001810



This free, CPD learning module, developed by Action Bladder Cancer UK in partnership with NB Medical, is designed to enhance GPs' knowledge of bladder cancer and ultimately improve early diagnosis of bladder cancer within primary care.

In this one-hour module, you will access case-study based learning on:

- The signs and symptoms of bladder cancer including specific cases of visible haematuria, non-visible haematuria and persistent UTIs.
- The epidemiology of bladder cancer, in addition to the aetiology and risk factors for bladder cancer.
- Recognising the clinical features of bladder cancer.
- How to manage these bladder cancer cases and how secondary care investigate and manage bladder cancer.

You can register for the module online at:

<https://actionbladdercanceruk.org/primary-care-education>

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